THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMMED): (a) and (b) Visa applicants do stand in a queue outside the Embassy. This is mainly due to exponential increase in the number of visa applications that the Mission has started receiving everyday (a 100 per cent increase in applications between 2003 and 2007). Owing to shortage of space, it is difficult to seat all the visa applications within the Embassy premises.

Government have taken a decision to outsource visa application collection in France with effect from February 2008. This would resolve the issue of rush of visa seekers at the Embassy premises and will make process of application submission more applicant-friendly.

Energy Preservation Cell

†1850. SHRI UDAY PRATAP SINGH: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government has constituted Energy Preservation Cell under his Ministry; and

(b) if so, the details thereof and the countries with which stress is being laid to increase participation for energy preservation co-operation?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE): (a) and (b) An Energy Security Unit has been established in the Ministry of External Affairs recently within the Investment and Technology Promotion Division in the Ministry. The function of the Unit is to enhance India's energy security by promoting cooperation in this sector with other countries.

Problem of electric energy

†1851. SHRI BANWARI LAL KANCHHAL: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government would clarify if the nuclear agreement would solve the problem of electric energy;

(b) what would be the position regarding financial gains that the country would have from the nuclear agreement; and

(c) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE): (a) to (c) The agreement between India and the US on the cooperation in civil uses of nuclear energy could result in substantial additional power generating capacity. The Integrated Energy Policy, 2006 sets a target for the year 2020 of 20,000 MW of nuclear power generation. This could double with international cooperation.

It is critical that India's current GDP growth rate of 8-10% per annum is maintained in order to achieve the objective of eradication of poverty. For this, it is necessary to explore and exploit all sources of energy. The additionality of nuclear energy will help to achieve India's energy targets and contribute to growth in vital sectors of India's economy including industry and agriculture.

† Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.